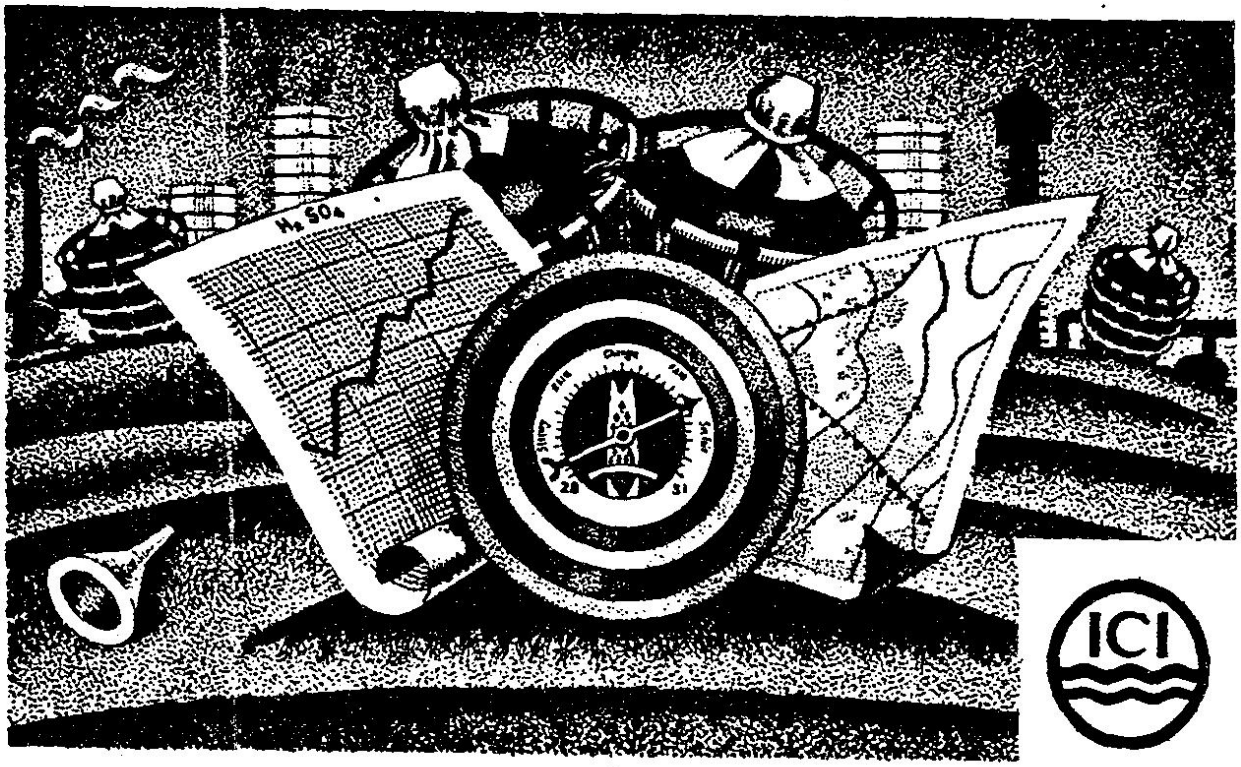
SULPHURIC ACID

Sulphuric acid is one of the most important of all the "heavy" chemicals. It is of such fundamental importance that its consumption can be regarded as the barometer of a nation's industrial capacity. It is essential for hundreds of products—artificial silk, dyes, electric accumulators, explosives, fertilizers, paper, plastics and weedkillers, to mention but a few. It is also used extensively in several branches of the metal industry. A Birmingham doctor, John Roebuck, developed the first commercial method of manufacture in 1746, and 85 years later, Peregrine Phillips, a vinegar manufacturer of Bristol, patented a Contact Process. By this method, which today is responsible for half the output of this vital chemical, sulphur dioxide — obtained by burning sulphur, iron pyrites, zinc blende, or other substances rich in sulphur — is made to combine at high temperature with oxygen. The combination takes place in the presence of certain metal "Catalysts" which have the remarkable effect of speeding up the reaction without themselves taking part in it. The combination of sulphur dioxide and oxygen yields sulphur trioxide, which combines with water to form sulphuric acid.

Britain's achievement in respect of Sulphuric Acid is a double one. Not only were the two principal processes of manufacture invented by Englishmen, but the raising of production to present levels — about 1,300,000 tons yearly — is a triumph of British chemical engineering.



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